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A
S E R M O N,

ON THE

ILLUMINATION of the HOLY SPIRIT,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH of TIVERTON,

MAY 21st, 1794.

Before the Reverend the CLERGY, at the Archidiaconal Visitation of the

LORD BISHOP OF EXETER;

And published at their Request.

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EXETER:

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IT is with the utmost diffidence and not a little reluctance that the Author of this discourse presents it to the public ; his own opinion of it having been very different from that of his reverend and learned hearers.

THEIR request, however, for its publication was made in such terms and in such a manner, as could not be resisted without the imputation of perverseness and obstinacy.

It is with the most high regard and
a true affection that the friends of this
country's government in the present day own
opinion of it has been very different
from that of the past and is now
different.

It is true, however, for its part
that the world is now more and more
of a nation as well as the world
without the influence of power and
and industry.

A SERMON.



LUKE XVIII. 34.

AND THEY UNDERSTOOD NONE OF THESE THINGS,
AND THIS SAYING WAS HID FROM THEM, NEI-
THER KNEW THEY THE THINGS WHICH WERE
SPOKEN.

WHAT the apostles are recorded to have been thus ignorant of, was, as we read in the preceding verse, the death and resurrection of their master ; those events upon which the whole of our religion is founded. The time when so little was understood of the end for which our Lord came into the world, was a few days only before he left it, while he was upon his journey to the passover, to fulfil the sacrifice typified in that feast.

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To these men, confessedly ignorant of what they were to teach, bigoted in all the prejudices, and devoid of the learning of their countrymen, was the commission given, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. What then shall we say of a system consigned to such hands? What means remained, by which the gospel *could* be preached to every creature? With men indeed this was impossible, but with God all things are possible. The light of nature, like the uncertain glimmerings of an earthborn meteor, would have led the mind benighted and bewildered, through endless mazes and perplexities; till at last, sunk in the abyss of Jewish prejudices, it would have demanded a sign, and established a temporal prince as its Messiah. But when the meridian splendor of revelation bursts upon the mind, it at once acknowledges, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and that the weakness of God is stronger than men. Power, that darling of the human soul, would too soon have corrupted the honest simplicity of the first establishers of christianity: having taken their master by force to make him a king, they would have supported his pretensions and doctrine with similar violence. Thus indeed he *might* have drawn all
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men unto him : imbrued in the blood of the slain, he might have stood for an ensign of the people, to which the Gentiles *would* have fought. The pointed sword and the impending ax speak all languages, and whether the system to be introduced is of religion or politics, their arguments are not to be withstood : the missionary thus supported, shall gain profelytes wheresoever he directs his course. Add fraud to the force, let the system pander the licentious passions of men, or feed their avarice with rapine, and it shall become inveterate in their minds, blended with, and dear to them as their vices.

Not so the blessed Jesus ; the only power he exerted, was that given him by his Father over all flesh, that he should give eternal life ; the only victory he fought for, was that over the great spiritual enemy, the prince of the powers of darkness ; the blandishment he used towards his disciples, was to assure them that they must take up their crosses to follow him. View his life, from his first drawing his breath in a stable to his last expiring agony under the hands of his murderers, and what is there in

the whole that does not bespeak him a king, but not of this world ; consider the prospects of his early followers, and say, whether if in this life only they had hope in Christ, they were not of all men most miserable. Christ sought not worldly means to disseminate his gospel : he chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which were mighty. These foolish, these weak things, were witnesses unto him, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. The strength indeed of the Lord is made perfect in weakness : the propagation of this system with these instruments, could only have been effected by the miraculous interposition of that Being, which called light out of darkness. We shall receive the fullest conviction of this, if we take a view of it in all its circumstances, which, according to the calculation that human wisdom can furnish, we shall find exhibiting only one continued scene of uninterrupted and unsurmountable difficulties.

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Let us begin with supposing, that these Galileans could have compassed sea and land to make profelytes, let us suppose, that by their zeal, the grace of God that bringeth salvation might have appeared unto all men : I would ask then what reception it was likely to meet with, when it taught, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, men should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Whether we look towards the Jews or Gentiles, towards those who worshiped God, or those who worshiped him not ; at the time of our Savior's coming, we shall find wickedness and a total depravation of manners reaching their highest point, and reigning universally among all classes of men. For this we have the express testimony not only of scripture, but of their own writers, whether Jews or Gentiles : and we must all have observed, how much vice weakens the understanding, and infatuates the judgment; and in particular, what a thorough inaptitude it causes in the mind, to the reception of religious truth. How then should the common preacher of righteousness convert a world, which thus hearing heard and did not understand, which seeing saw and did not perceive ? How much soever men may be induced, through education
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and custom, outwardly to conform to a religion which they inwardly violate, and to reconcile practical atheism with professed belief; yet the real and voluntary *change* of religion implies somewhat of principle awakened in the mind; and the heart must have felt, when a religion of the heart is thus embraced. The difficulty is not a little increased, when, as in the case before us, more severe injunctions are added by the new religion; when points of morality are inculcated, which Jewish traditions, and Gentile philosophy had gradually erased. It is evident how little the world was prepared for a system of such holiness, or indeed of holiness at all, when both Jews and Pagans had separated virtue from religion; which they seemed to agree in reducing to mere rites and ceremonies: with this difference however, that the Jews were bigoted in the highest degree to their ceremonial law, which, from the consideration of its divine origin, they esteemed everlasting and of perpetual obligation: while the Gentiles, even of the first abilities and acquirements, displayed the utmost indifference to religion in general, all of which they supposed like their own, and condemned it unheard as fable and inconsistent forgery. Dispositions these, which allow no one system
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to take place generally, and which appear each to militate in the strongest manner against christianity ; and this more especially when we consider the respective opinions consequent on these dispositions. Among the nations, religion was not esteemed a personal concern, and a man was thought to have fulfilled his duty in this particular, when he conformed to the established mode of the country in which he lived. Among the Israelites, there was no one who did not expect that the Messiah should be a temporal prince, sent to deliver them from the Roman yoke ; and that all the magnificent language, in which the prophets had at times spoken of him, should instantly be fulfilled in the grandeur of his reign. With these expectations, this affection for their law, and their consequent contempt and abhorrence of the Gentiles, it scarcely excites our astonishment, that they should reject the doctrine of a crucified Savior, which declared that their ceremonies had been appointed only as figures for the time then present ; and still less, that they should oppose the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. The aversion was mutual ; and amongst the Gentiles it appeared no trifling addition to the scandal of the cross, that the Savior and
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his apostles arose out of the despised tribes of Israel : to pass over the contempt which they received from all parties, for the meaness of their extraction and education.

If all these causes seem to leave no reasonable hope of the establishment of christianity, what shall we say, when the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against it? In addition to the motives which influenced other men, the crooked policy of state contrivance distorted the minds of the rulers from admitting the bright beams of the gospel. The chief priests and the Pharisees thought that Jesus might cause the Romans to come and take away both their place and nation, and from that day they took counsel together to put him to death ; having succeeded, their characters with the people were concerned ever after, to oppose his doctrine and its professors. To the bloody tyrants who filled the imperial seat at Rome, the increasing numbers of the christians supplied the-motive, and their own power the justification, for using all means to suppress this religion. The consequences, which are but too well known, prove the depravity of man, and how vainly

vainly he exerts his utmost power to eradicate the smallest grain, which God hath planted.

Such difficulties presented themselves from the persons to whom the gospel was to be *preached*; but did there none arise from the *preachers* themselves? At the death of our Savior, we see them all confounded and scattered; and even after his resurrection, whenever they venture to assemble, the doors are kept shut for fear of the Jews. From whence then should they receive courage to testify to this people, whom they dreaded so much and with so much reason, that they had crucified the Lord of glory? If their master's resurrection and ascension so far revived their drooping spirits, that they could still trust, that it might be he who should redeem Israel; yet what proof of this could they possibly give to the Jews? Their master had himself been approved of God among them, by miracles and wonders and signs; and yet who believed his report, and to whom was the arm of the Lord revealed? How again should these men be so far divested of their prepossessions as well as their fears, that they should attempt the conversion of the Gentiles, or ever

the Samaritans? So strongly were they tinged with the national expectation of a temporal Messiah, that even after the resurrection of our Lord, we find them asking him, Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Are these then the men, that should gather the sheep which were not of that fold, so that there should be one fold and one shepherd? If they were able, like St. Paul, to wish themselves accursed for their brethren their kinsmen according to the flesh, yet how should they so far unlearn their prejudices as to see, that when they preached the gospel to the Gentiles, they were not taking the childrens bread and casting it unto dogs? If the mind of any *one* of them should be so far enlightened, as to engage in this labor of love, how should he gain over his fellow-laborers, to a cause so opposite to their hopes and wishes? But supposing them all willing to bear the name of Jesus, before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; yet how should they be able to preach the word, amongst men, of whose languages they were ignorant; and how should they at once become possessed of all the different languages, that were spoken in that immense tract of country, where they were to preach? And if they could thus bear testimony
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to the great facts of christianity—the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, yet how should they be able to shew, that Christ *ought* to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory? How should they gain a perfect knowledge of that comprehensive system, which the angels desire to look into; and be able to make known, what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles? After all, what should prevent their deep-rooted attachment to the law from shewing itself; and if it *did* shew itself, (as we know it did in some, turning again to the weak and beggarly elements) how should the gospel stand, and stand too in its native truth, simplicity, and liberty.——
 I know but one method to solve these difficulties.——
 The apostles of Jesus were baptized of the Holy Ghost.

Though it must be owned, that in the propagation of the gospel, under the circumstances and in the time it *was* propagated, the hand of God would have stood confessed, even had all earthly powers contributed their aid: yet undoubtedly the strongest and most convincing argument we have of the divine origin of the gospel, arises

from the unpromising and inadequate means applied to its establishment. We can have no doubt, that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, when we see him choosing twelve despised Galileans, to perfect the scheme of the gospel; men, who forsook him and denied him, and who during the time of his sojourning here, never understood his meaning. Was there ever an impostor, who formed a scheme that was not to be unfolded, to his nearest adherents, till after his death, and could there be any collusion, with men totally ignorant of the system that was to be propagated? Had Jesus chosen men of knowledge for his followers and left them fully instructed in his scheme—had they afterwards preached with enticing words of man's wisdom, it might have been suspected, that the whole was the *effect* of *man's* wisdom: but now it stands in the demonstration of the spirit and of power. Had *Jesus only* appeared with miracles, it might possibly still have been said, that his coming was after the power of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders: but after the day of pentecost, when he had fulfilled his promise to his disciples that they should do greater works than he did, the comforter did indeed reprove the world of sin, of righteousness,

ousness, and judgment. Had the gospel been preached; and preached to the *Gentiles*, so that no suspicion could be entertained against its authenticity; they might yet fear, that they were still aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise: but after God had sealed them, and given them the earnest of the spirit in their hearts, no doubt could remain, that they were fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. When such are the effects of the illumination of the spirit, may not every one of us exclaim, with him who shed it forth, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

But let us carry our views a step further, to the consideration of the manner in which they were revealed; from whence will arise new cause of adoring the wisdom of God. In the works of nature, we observe the utmost contrivance joined to the most perfect simplicity; and the further philosophy can push her investigations, the more
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does she admire the exactness, with which each link of the great chain of causes is adapted to the production of its effect. In the moral world, the like display of wisdom and goodness is to be observed: but most particularly in the dispensation of the fullness of times, where no operation of the spirit was bestowed, which does not seem wanting, both in the degree and for the time it was exerted, to the confirmation of the truth; none was denied, which could be necessary to its general establishment. If we consider the diversities of gifts which proceeded from the spirit, as they are recorded and appealed to by the apostles, we must be convinced of the truth of St. Paul's observation, that the spirit was given to every man, to profit withal. What indeed must have been the state of the different churches, if none of their members had been constituted by the Holy Ghost apt to teach, none been appointed to rule, and no power of discerning the spirits been left with them? The like, though perhaps in a less degree, may be observed of all the other gifts, of whose design and effect we are fully informed. But with the office of the apostles we are most acquainted, as in it we are most interested. The apostles were the persons appointed to declare the righteousness

ness of God: upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, is the whole church built; Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. The scripture which at this day directs our faith and practice, and which, as we justly hold, containeth all things necessary to salvation, comes to us either written by these men, or revised by them and sanctioned by their approbation. It was the commands of these apostles of the Lord and Savior, that the primitive church was to be mindful of; and it was the form of sound words which it had heard from them, that it was to hold fast. It is true, that God set both evangelists and teachers: the business however of these was not to convert, but to set in order things that were wanting, and to instruct as they themselves had been instructed. The apostles planted the churches, and having planted them, were obliged by the extensiveness of their commission, to leave them to be watered by these their fellow-laborers. From the hands of the apostles did the churches receive the Holy Ghost; and from no other hands does this illumination appear ever to have been received. The apostles therefore, as St. Paul clearly intimates to the Romans, had the first fruits of the spirit; to them
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of whom so much was required, much also was given, and illumination was vouchsafed in proportion to the greatness and extent of their office. They had the word of wisdom, and the word of knowledge; the powers of their minds were extended so as instantaneously to receive the scheme of the gospel, and at the same time a clear comprehensive view of the types, allegories, and prophecies, that referred to it under the old dispensation. This treasure, which, as it is expressed by one of them, they had in earthen vessels, *they* also held, not for their own glory or their own advantage, but only as a sacred deposit for the edifying of the body of Christ. At the first effusion on the day of pentecost, the whole was not necessary for this purpose, the whole therefore was not given: at that time the apostles were not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and accordingly the gospel only as far as it related to them, was at that time revealed. It is most evident, that the apostles had not then a suspicion, that they were to preach even to the *devout* Gentiles: for this a new commission and a new effusion of the Holy Ghost were necessary. Yet still were they wholly ignorant, that the *fullness* of the Gentiles was to come in: for this work two new apostles

were

were called, and again were the disciples filled with the Holy Ghost. Then and not till then, was the gospel fully laid open, and the mystery revealed, which had been kept secret since the world began. Thus had the apostles the Holy Spirit constantly and in its utmost fullness residing in them, and enriching them in all utterance and in all knowledge; till having finished the work which the Lord had given them to do, they resigned *it* with their own spirits, into his hands. A short time after, at most long before the close of the second century, all the other illuminations of the spirit ceased also. The church had now overcome all difficulties, it had taken deep root, and had filled the land: having then received its canon of scripture, having received the witness of the Holy Ghost, it might well be left with that assurance of our Savior, that the gates of hell should not prevail against it.

From this account of the illumination of the spirit, we may learn what attention we ought to pay to the pretensions, which are made to it in the present day. We, who confess that we have it not, cannot be supposed to

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possess

possess the gift of discerning the spirits ; we can however try them by the dictates, both of the gospel and of right reason. By their fruits ye shall know them, says our Lord : and his apostle has said, Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which *we have* preached unto you, let him be accursed. We may ask these highly favored persons, for what end such an excellent gift is vouchsafed unto them, what new design of Providence they are to carry on, and what their knowledge consists in : at the same time we may intimate, that neither the blessed Jesus, nor his apostles, demanded men's assent without a proof of their mission. Believe me for the very work's sake, says our Savior : and the apostle reminds his Corinthian converts, that the *signs* of an apostle were wrought among them, in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. But these men bear witness of themselves ; and their practice keeps pace with their pretensions : they reject all learning, and those studies by which they might know the holy scriptures, that are able to make us wise unto salvation ; and self-appointed, they take unto themselves the honor and power of the priesthood. We know the promise made by our Savior to his disciples, that the

Father

Father should give them another comforter, that he might abide with them for ever, even the spirit of truth. We acknowledge with the sincerest gratitude, this communion of the Holy Ghost with true believers, and we earnestly pray for his assistance as absolutely necessary to us in our spiritual warfare : but we make no arrogant claim to what was never promised us, nor do we presume to wish for what is not necessary. It is our concern, so to attune our souls, that they may be sensible of the still calm voice in which the Comforter will speak to them ; not impiously to demand the sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. Thus inspired we can, and it is our duty that we *should*, exert our faculties to the attainment of a competent knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ—those faculties, which the God of wisdom and of all mercies has esteemed sufficient for us. This is indeed the bounden duty of all men, as far as their several stations will permit ; but in a most eminent degree of us, whose lips should keep knowledge, and at whose mouth *they* should seek the law. And this seems to be still more necessary, at a time, when there appears to be little of that spirit of love, which would make men with one mind and one mouth glorify God,—but when after

their own lusts, they are heaping to themselves teachers; having itching ears.

I do not, I cannot doubt, that you, my reverend brethren, have all been nourished up, in the words of faith and of good doctrine: and I am most truly sensible how much need I myself have to apply to you, for instruction in the mysteries of divine truth. But I will venture before I conclude, in a few words, most earnestly to exhort you, not to refrain your lips, not to hide the righteousness of God within your heart, but to preach it in his great congregation. It has been but too customary for ministers to confine their addresses to their flocks within the bounds of mere morality: and this has been palliated by an alledged want of capacity in the common people, to be led into the depths of religious knowledge. If however this incapacity were real, it must preclude their understanding the still *more* abstruse proofs of moral obligation, and must be a standing impeachment of the justice of the Almighty, who demands the belief of these truths. By this practice and this reasoning, we degrade ourselves below the rank of heathen philosophers, and our hearers
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below that of men ; and we give too much reason to the favorers of that irregular, scismatical ministry, to assert that we are not preachers of the gospel. We cannot indeed be too earnest in declaring that the design of our Savior's mission was, as St. Peter testified, to bless us in turning away every one of us from his iniquities. We *must* enforce the practice of the gospel precepts ; but if we are the ministers of Christ, we must enforce them by means of the *doctrine* of the gospel, and upon the *motives* which the gospel offers. If we are the stewards of the mysteries of God, we must, as good and faithful stewards, dispense these mysteries in his household the church : we should otherwise in effect shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, by thus preventing the light of the glorious gospel of Christ from shining unto them ; we should conceal what manner of love the Father hath shewn unto them, and we should exclude them from the merits of him, who died to redeem them, and from the influence of the Holy Spirit, whose blessed operation gave that knowledge, which would thus be so unjustly detained from them.

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